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ABSTRACT

The original action seeking school desegregation in Nashvill-Davidson, Tennessee was filed in court in 1955. The initial action had little immediate impact and efforts in the next decade were slow and minimal. In 1971 Plan A, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) Plan, was implemented. This incorporated geographic zone changes, clustering, pairing, and grade restructuring. The plan further stipulated that no school in the system would be more than 44% black. Overall opposition to desegregation was relatively high and opponents were supported in their opposition by the metro council and other political leaders. The metro council voted funds to fight the lawsuit and later withheld funds that were necessary to successfully implement the busing phase of the plan. Since court ordered desegregation went into effect, several phenomena have resulted. Seven inner city schools have been closed, portable classrooms abound in the suburbs, black enrollment has remained stable, and white enrollment has decreased. Today, in the fifth year of the plan, there are about 24 schools in which the black enrollment ranges from over 50% to almost 95%. Resegregation seems to be occurring. This is due to the fact that the court ordered plan only rezoned two thirds of the county's schools. Only enough white schools were included to break down the racial identity of the inner city. On the positive side, Nashville's desegregation plan did not cost black administrators their jobs as has happened in other cities. (Author/AM)

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SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN NASHVILLE-DAVIDSON, TENNESSEE

A STAFF REPORT OF THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

June 1977

UD017 409

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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At the appointment of the Staff Director of the Commission, all activities that contributed to this report were under the general supervision and coordination of William T. White, Jr., Assistant Staff Director, Office of National Civil Rights Issues.

PREFACE

The United States Commission on Civil Rights released on August 24, 1976, its report to the Nation: Fulfilling the Letter and Spirit of the Law: Desegregation of the Nation's Public Schools.

The report's findings and recommendations were based upon information gathered during a 10-month school desegregation project. This included four formal hearings (Boston, Massachusetts; Denver, Colorado; Louisville, Kentucky; and Tampa, Florida); four open meetings held by State Advisory Committees (Berkeley, California; Corpus Christi, Texas; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Stamford, Connecticut); a survey of nearly 1,300 local school districts; and 29 case studies of communities which had difficulties with desegregation, had moderate success with desegregation, or had substantial success with desegregation.

Subsequent to the report's release, considerable interest was generated concerning the specifics of the case study findings, which, owing to space limitations in the national report, were limited to a few brief paragraphs. In an effort to comply with public requests for more detailed information, Commission staff have prepared monographs for each of the case studies. These monographs were written from the extensive field notes already collected and supplemented, if needed, with further interviews in each community. They reflect, in detail, the original case study purpose of finding which local policies, practices, and programs in each community surveyed contributed to peaceful desegregation and which ones did not.

It is hoped that the following monograph will serve to further an understanding of the school desegregation process in this Nation.

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I. BACKGROUND

Nashville, which is not only the State capital but also the urban and economic hub of the Mid-Tennessee area, has exemplified, since 1963, a unique, successful and full-scale consolidation of the city and the county into one government.

The Nashville-Davidson County area merged so as to have the same geographic boundaries of 533 square miles with a total population in 1976 of 480,000. Approximately 97.4 percent of the population are urban dwellers. Minorities comprise 19.9 percent (89,153) of the total population.

The major economic force providing jobs for an estimated 33,500 workers in Nashville-Davidson is the government sector: Federal, State, and metropolitan government and the public school system. Various private industrial plants, the Vanderbilt University complex, and publishing companies provide the other major sources of employment.

There are 13 coeducational colleges and universities in Nashville (including Meharry Medical College, one of two predominately black medical colleges in the United States) with a combined student population of more than 22,000.

In 1975 there were 137 public schools in Metro Nashville-Davidson School District with a student population of 80,165. The racial breakdown of students was 23,372 black, 56,479 white, and 314 others.[1]

Total faculty in 1975 numbered 4,500 with a racial composition of 1,065 blacks and 3,408 whites.

In February 1976 the Tennessee Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights conducted a case study of school desegregation in Metro Nashville-Davidson County. Personal interviews were held with community leaders, city administrators, school board members, media people, school administrators, principals, teachers, and students. The following report and conclusions are based on these interviews and other investigations.

II. HISTORY

The original action seeking school desegregation by the Nashville school system was filed in Federal court in September 1955. The initial action had little immediate impact and efforts in the next decade were slow and minimal.

The metro school system was organized in 1964 and divided into three geographic districts.[2] Each district contained not only elementary but also senior high (grades 10-12) and junior high (grades 7-12) schools as well. Some schools were a combined center for junior and senior high grades. The districts were so divided as to maintain pupil segregation; for example, in the fall of 1970, all three districts had a total black pupil population of 15 percent each, but 17 of the 26 schools in district I had less than 5 percent blacks enrolled; 23 of the 28 district II schools has less than 5 percent blacks as pupils; and district III had 18 out of 24 schools with less than 5 percent black students. Some schools enrolled no black pupils at all and some schools had a black enrollment ranging from 90 to 100 percent.

In 1970 Avon Williams, attorney for the plaintiffs, filed a suit to prohibit the Metropolitan County Board of Education of Nashville and Davidson County, Tennessee, from maintaining racially segregated schools and from employing school personnel on the basis of race.[3] On July 16, 1970, Federal District Judge William E. Miller held that the local school board had not met its affirmative duty to abolish the dual school system in three categories: pupil integration, faculty integration, and site selection for school construction.[4] The approval and implementation of a plan to correct the adjudicated wrongs was delayed until the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ordered immediate hearings for that purpose.

On June 28, 1971, subsequent to the hearing which resulted in three plans (plaintiffs, board of education, and a Department of Health, Education, and Welfare plan requested by the court) to be submitted for review by Judge

L. Clure Morton, a memorandum opinion was issued adopting the HEW plan beginning school year 1971-72.[5]

III. ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH DESEGREGATION OCCURRED

Prior to desegregation activities, it was generally conceded that race relations in Nashville were generally good. However, parental attitudes toward desegregation for the most part were divided along racial lines: white parents wanted no changes in the status quo and opposed desegregation; many minority parents favored desegregation and wanted changes to ensure "quality education."

Attitudes of students generally reflected those of their parents. A great deal of parental and peer pressure influenced the overt actions of both minority and white students. Despite individual attitudes, neither white nor minority students particularly wanted to give up their schools or familiar surroundings.

Dr. Elbert D. Brooks, recruited by the metropolitan school board to facilitate impending desegregation, became director of schools on July 1, 1970. The school administration, by and large, attempted to maintain a neutral position while working cooperatively with the school board and other public institutions. In this respect, the school administration, as a body, made a positive contribution to the desegregation process.

Several of the Nashville faculty members interviewed (teachers and counselors) generally favored desegregation. Black teachers were apprehensive over the effect desegregation would have on their professional mobility and on their assignment location. White teachers who were most opposed to desegregation left the school system and accepted positions at private academies. The majority of teachers, however, remained in the system and also kept their own children enrolled. The teachers' union, Metropolitan Nashville Education Association, supported desegregation but played no major role in formulating an acceptable plan.

Leadership from the business, religious, and media sectors was mixed. The business community maintained a low profile and was inactive before and during the desegregation process. It was reported that, during the latter stages of

litigation, the business community placed a full-page advertisement in the newspaper supporting peaceful implementation. In the white religious community there was a major cleavage--conservative religious leaders supported antidesegregation forces while liberal leaders supported desegregation. Black religious leaders were solid in their support, although their primary efforts came from the pulpit and were directed at their congregations.

There is no concensus as to the role of the news media during the desegregation process. There are those who felt that the media provided "additional support and objective reporting," while others believed they "inflamed" the situation. Of the two local newspapers, only one supported desegregation; the other was opposed.

Political leaders were opposed to desegregation from its infancy. The 40-member city council (35 district and 5 at-large members) voted funds to fight the lawsuit filed against the board of education.

IV. PLAN DESCRIPTION

United States District Judge L. Clure Morton initially requested the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to prepare a school desegregation plan for the Nashville-Davidson school district. The judge ruled that the HEW plan was acceptable to the court. He ordered the rezoning of only about two-thirds of the county's 141 schools. Many white suburban schools in the outer reaches of the county were not affected. Judge Morton ruled that "each and every school is not required to be integrated. The test is a unitary school system. The practicability and feasibility of a plan is a material consideration."

To prevent resegregation or white flight to the unaffected schools, the judge ordered that construction or expansion would not be allowed at those schools not included in the busing order, i.e., there would be no classroom space for growth in the surburbs.

Plan A, the HEW plan, incorporated geographic zone changes, clustering, pairing (both contiguous and noncontiguous), and grade restructuring. The plan further stipulated that no school in the system would be more than 44 percent black.

Elementary Schools

Under Plan A, 5 schools would be closed[6] and 74 schools would have a composition of from 16 to 41 percent black. Three of the 22 schools located in the far reaches of the county would have no blacks and the remaining schools would be up to 11 percent black. No elementary school in the system would have a black student enrollment of more than 41 percent. Fifty-nine percent of the black students in the system would attend schools with a black enrollment of between 25 and 41 percent. One percent of the district's black elementary students, or 125 black students, would be enrolled in the 16 schools with less than 5 percent black. Twenty-four percent of the white students in the system would attend schools in which black enrollment was less than 5 percent.

Under the provisions of Plan A, approximately 22,000 elementary school students would be eligible for school-provided transportation--10,500 more than the board transported in 1970-71, and 9,700 more than would have been transported under the board's 1970 plan (rejected by the court as totally inadequate). However, 5,000 fewer would be transported under the HEW's plan than under the rejected plan submitted by the plaintiffs.

Junior and Senior High Schools

Under the plan approved by the court for secondary schools, Central High School would be closed; McGavock High School was to be opened. Of the 18 senior high schools; 11 would have from 8 to 44 percent black enrollments, 1 would have 11 percent, and 6 would have virtually an all-white student enrollment. The all-white high schools are located in the outer reaches of the county.

An analysis of the original HEW plan for secondary schools reflected that:

- no school would operate with more than 44 percent black;
- out of 43 schools, 29 (with 90 percent of the total black enrollment) would have from 15 to 44 percent black enrollments, with 1 additional school having 11 percent black enrollment;
- 13 schools, primarily in the outer reaches of the county, would have 95 percent or more white enrollments;
- transportation would be required for 26,673 junior and senior high school students; and
- including the transportation necessary for McGavock School, 2,838 more secondary pupils would be transported in the 1970-71 school year.

The court rejected the plans for the secondary schools submitted by the plaintiffs and school board as totally inadequate, and adopted the HEW plan. As a result of the

evidence produced at the hearing, the HEW plan was amended to:

(1) adjust downward the black percentage at North High School from 65 to 44 percent black, and at Pearl High School to 33 percent black, with corresponding adjustments in Stratford, Maplewood, and other schools;

(2) shorten the busing time of certain pupils;

(3) incorporate the school board's plan for McGavock High School. McGavock would be a comprehensive high school serving an area in which several junior high schools are located despite the fact that it required more busing over longer distances than in the original HEW plan.

V. PLAN DEFICIENCIES

In the 1970-71 school year, 94,170 students attended the metropolitan schools. Of this number, 33,485 were transported by the school system. Of those transported, fewer than 4,000 were black and approximately 30,000 were white. Under the court-ordered plan, for the 1971-72 school year approximately 18,500 elementary and 26,673 junior and senior school students (a total of 45,173 students) were eligible for school-provided transportation. This was an increase of 11,688 students bused by school transportation over the 1970-71 school year.

A negative aspect of the plan was the disproportionate number of younger black children who would be bused. Because of the way Nashville schools are paired, black children are bused out of the inner city for the first 4 years of elementary school, and white children are bused into the city for grades five and six. The pairing or clustering of schools created a number of one- and two-grade schools, which caused problems not only with the curriculum but also in parental support.

In 1971 the school system encountered a major problem because it lacked sufficient buses to implement the new rezoning plan and the city council had refused to appropriate money. The school system had to stagger school opening times over 3 hours--7 a.m. until 10 a.m.--so that each bus could make several runs. This created scheduling problems for parents, especially working mothers who had children attending different schools.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLIANCE

Faculty desegregation was implemented one year prior to the desegregation of the students. On July 16, 1970, Judge William Miller in this case stated:

> It is well recognized that faculty and staff integration is "an important aspect of the basic task of achieving a public school system wholly free from racial discrimination." In order to implement this mandate, the court concludes that in the instant case faculties must be fully integrated so that the ratio of black and white faculty members of each school shall be approximately the same as the ratio of black to white teachers in the system as a whole. It is the conclusion of the court that the present policy of faculty desegregation applied by defendant is constitutionally inadequate. That policy must be altered to comply with the standards set forth above. A similar policy also must be applied to all other personnel employed by defendant school board.[7]

The court-required ratio for teachers in each school was fixed at 80 percent white to 20 percent black. Approximately 94 schools were not operating within the court-ordered ratio. In most schools, this ratio was accomplished by transferring one or two teachers. The board of education believed that there would be no difficulty in meeting the 1970 court-ordered ratio for teachers in the school year beginning in September 1971.

To facilitate faculty transfers, which in some instances resulted in the transfer of members of a predominately black faculty to a majority white faculty, a human relations department was established with a black director. A black was also elevated to the position of assistant superintendent in charge of staff development.

Federal assistance in the amount of $565,000 was received from the Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAP)

to aid in the desegregation process. These funds were used for staff development, human relations, logistical support, and technical assistance.

A very sophisticated and innovative human relations training program was instituted for teachers and administrators (approximately 20 hours of required attendance) and was purported to be highly successful by those who completed the program. Some of the courses included multiracial/multiethnic history and culture; revision of curriculum to include multiracial/multiethnic perspectives; social dynamics, such as sensitivity training for teachers, students, bus drivers, and parents; and communications to improve dialogue on issues. In addition, the human relations department received recognition for its innovative training programs and was featured in Human Relations, a journal of the National School Public Relations Association.

VII. SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMS BY THE ADMINISTRATION

To complement and support the plan, the administration developed new and innovative programs: team teaching, individualized instruction, environmental education, closed-circuit television, independent study programs, work-study programs, mini-school plans with interdisciplinary teaching, open space facilities, cooperative teaching, enrichment and remedial summer programs, and special Federal projects. Other curriculum innovations include: the State's first "out-of-school" credit program; expansion of volunteer and paraprofessional services; expansion and emphasis on vocational youth leadership programs; expanded guidance and related supportive services for pupils; individualized mathematics instruction in certain elementary situations, but systemwide at the junior high level; calculator labs and computer math programs in selected schools; and developmental and remedial reading programs. Elementary music programs received a big boost from a $20,000 grant from the Nashville Symphony and local musicians' union for live performances.

Metro school district prepared for the State's expansion opportunities in new special education and developed a new curriculum guide for teachers of the trainable retarded students.

To provide more educational choices for students, the board formulated a written policy that "the curriculum of the high school shall be comprehensive, designed to fit the needs of all students." It specified further that "a grade 9-12 organizational plan shall be the goal of the Metro Board of Education in order to establish the most effective grouping for senior high students."

One senior high school, Hume-Fogg, was established as a "choice" school, i.e., any student within the metro system could attend as a "freedom of choice." The school is primarily vocational oriented and the racial composition is equally divided between black and white students.

There was an effort to foster and maintain the level of extracurricular activities at all affected schools. The athletic programs were singled out as a very cohesive force in maintaining student morale and providing a forum for student interaction.

VIII. THE ENVIRONMENT FOR TRANSITION

Schools in Metro-Nashville opened on schedule in early September 1971. In the first week about 80 percent of the total student enrollment attended school, but attendance eventually climbed to more than 90 percent. Resistance to school desegregation in the forms of pickets and boycotts lasted only the first few days. Violence was minimal and was usually limited to isolated instances of fighting between students. Peaceful implementation of desegregation has been attributed to the efforts of the police department which maintained law and order and enforced the law swiftly and impartially.

About four new, private, segregated academies were organized, and others already in existence received additional students. Some white parents moved out of the school district to surrounding counties with lower tax bases and no busing for racial purposes. In discussing the steady decline of white student enrollment in the Nashville-Davidson County schools, Dr. Elbert D. Brooks, superintendent of Nashville schools stated, "We tried to pin down the number we lost that we could attribute directly to integration. We figured 6,800 the first year [1971-72], out of 95,000 students, and 2,600 the second year [1972-73]."

Community

After litigation ended and Plan A was implemented, the reaction was generally one of resigned acceptance. There was little or no public opposition to the plan from civic leaders, ministers, or the news media; they called for calm acceptance and obedience to the law.

Two major community groups were active during the transition. One biracial group, Concerned Citizens for Improved Schools, pushed for a faster movement toward a unitary system. This group developed a plan featuring far greater school desegregation than the plan ultimately implemented and submitted it to the school board. The second group, Concerned Citizens, was most vocal and open in its opposition to all the plans and desegregation in

general. This group rallied behind a mayoral candidate running on an antidesegregation platform. (The candidate narrowly lost the election.)

There was no significant activity in the community in the period following desegregation. The opposition group, aware that it had failed in the court and at the polls, accepted the situation but maintained a state of optimism that something would happen to reverse the court order.

IX. EFFECTS OF DESEGREGATION

Educational Quality

The greatest gains appear to have been in the areas of curriculum expansion and facility upgrading. However, these two areas are more readily identifiable than some of the more intrinsic qualities such as teacher performance and student motivation. Some members of the community thought that the quality of education had deteriorated since school desegregation. Students saw no appreciable difference in the quality of education or in teacher performance.

Interracial Attitudes and Relations

The abruptness of implementation created tensions for students, faculty, and community as well as for the school administration. However, race and ethnic relations in the system have improved substantially as many students related that "the single greatest aspect of desegregation is a greater understanding and appreciation of students of different races or backgrounds." Although there is still a great deal of self-imposed social segregation in the schools, there is little, if any, in school-sponsored activities. In addition, students are being enriched by exposure to more teachers of different race or ethnic groups. Blacks have been elevated to positions of administrative leadership previously not held by blacks; for example, of the nine-member school board, two are black. This marks the first time there is minority representation on that decisionmaking body.

X. CONCLUSIONS

The major impetus for school desegregation in Metro Nashville was the court order. Overall opposition to desegregation was relatively high and opponents were supported in their opposition by the metro council and other political leaders. The metro council voted funds to fight the lawsuit and later withheld funds that were necessary to successfully implement the busing phase of the plan.

Degree of Success or Failure of Desegregation

Since court-ordered desegregation went into effect in Nashville-Davidson County, several phenomena have resulted. Seven inner-city schools have been closed; portable classrooms abound in the suburbs; black enrollment has remained stable at about 23,500; white enrollment has decreased by more than 15,000 from approximately 72,000 to about 56,500. Today, in the fifth year of the plan, there are about 24 schools in which the black enrollment ranges from over 50 percent to almost 95 percent. Thus, resegregation appears to be occurring. This is due, according to local leaders, to the fact that the court-ordered plan only rezoned two-thirds of the county's schools. Only enough white schools were included to break down the racial identity of schools in the inner city.

Many suburban schools in the outer county were unaffected. Apartments and condominiums have sprung up in what was once farmland. Many white families left Nashville-Davidson County to live in surrounding counties which have lower tax bases. Finally, black children are bused disproportionately, for although there was an increase of 11,688 students to be bused, the majority of the additional students were black.

On the positive side, Nashville's desegregation plan did not cost black administrators their jobs as happened in other cities. The numbers of black and white principals remained relatively the same in 1975 (21 black principals) as it was in 1970 (22 black principals). The number of black assistant principals, however, has more than doubled;

in 1975 the number was 16 and in 1970 there were 7. Other very significant improvements in the district schools occurred through the construction of new facilities, the renovation of existing structures, and a comprehensive study of building needs in the district.

Prospects for the Future

The Nashville School Board has attempted to develop a "Comprehensive School Plan" designed with desegregation as a priority. The school officials have taken the initiative as far as desegregating the high schools. They are planning (still in the formative stage and as money becomes available) a ring of high schools equidistant between the inner city and the suburbs. Recently, construction has begun for a new school, White Creek-Joelton.

School-sponsored activities have been desegregated throughout the county system, although black and white students still maintain a high degree of self-imposed social segregation. Perhaps the most encouraging indicator of future success in this desegregated school system is that students have cited increased interracial understanding as the most significant benefit they have experienced.

Nashville-Davidson County's relative success in desegregating its public schools is not accidental, but is the result of determined efforts by administrators, teachers, students, and parents both black and white. The school board, administration, and faculty feel that despite all the drawbacks, school desegregation can work, even though the school system has not had enough buses to implement the rezoning plan as well as it could. The metro council has refused year after year to appropriate money for new buses. The drop in enrollment reduces the amount of money Nashville schools receives from the State and that further complicates the system's already severe budgeting problems. If Nashville-Davidson's metropolitan government officials continue to block efforts to solve the immediate problem of insufficient student transportation, many observers worry that Nashville-Davidson's county school problems will remain largely unsolved. The school personnel are determined to make the plan work. They feel that their main concern now is improving the quality of education.

NOTES

1. Dr. Elbert D. Brooks, superintendent, Metro Nashville-Davidson School District, interview, Nashville, Feb. 12, 1976.

2. Reference to the separate and later consolidated actions regarding the city of Nashville and Davidson County systems is omitted for brevity.

3. Kelly v. Metropolitan County Board of Education, 317 F. Supp. 980 (M.D. Tenn. 1970).

4. Id.

5. 317 F. Supp. 980, enforced by Memorandum Opinion, Civil Action Nos. 2094 and 2956 (M.D. Tenn. June 28, 1971) (Morton, J.).

6. Three of the five schools to be closed were rated unsatisfactory by the consultants hired by the school board. The other two were listed as inadequate.

7. 317 F. Supp. 980 at 992.

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